

# theBeacon

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NEWS OF THE DIOCESE OF PATERSON

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## 'Prepare the Way' aids new Sandyston church

By MAURA ROSSI

SANDYSTON TWP. — The construction now under way for the new church of St. Thomas the Apostle parish here will get a \$333,000 boost from the \$1 million in parish capital assistance grants projected by "Prepare the Way," the \$40 million capital and endowment campaign designed to "strengthen the Church of Paterson in the Third Millennium."

St. Thomas is the Sussex County parish in the diocese designated for this capital assistance.

In Morris County, the planned recipient of a grant in the same amount will be

St. Mark the Evangelist parish in Long Valley, which has been using its parish center for worship. Plans have already been drawn for what will be St. Mark's first church.

In Passaic County, a similar grant is planned for St. Anthony of Padua parish in Paterson, which hopes to build a school gymnasium and parish center with the funds.

"St. Thomas is the first parish which the people of our diocese are helping in this community manner," said Msgr. Herbert K. Tillyer, vicar general and

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# 'Prepare the Way' . . .

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"Prepare the Way" campaign chairman.

"We are proud that 'Prepare the Way' is already making a real difference for one of our parishes in the new millennium."

The diocese's \$1 million appropriation for "Prepare the Way", he said, is helping three parishes which currently "have urgent construction needs which probably could not be undertaken at this time without major financial assistance."

"In each case the diocesan contribution is making the difference between the ability to develop the project now and postponing or not constructing a needed building in the future."

Ground was broken last August for the new St. Thomas Church at 210 Route 206 North in the township's Hainesville section, where the current church also is located. The building is well on its way to completion and to occupancy by early summer, according to Father Gerald Lewis, the pastor since 1997 of

154-family St. Thomas', which serves both Sandyston and Walpack Townships and territorially is the largest parish in the diocese.

Father Lewis is also the pastor of 180-family St. James the Greater parish in Montague, where he lives. He has a 14-mile drive every Sunday to say Mass in St. Thomas' present church, a converted former two-room schoolhouse "without even running water" and with a seating capacity of about 125.

In a recent interview, Father Lewis explained that the need for a new church has long been recognized and the project was begun by the late Msgr. James Gacquin after the parish received a gift of six acres of land from Reginald Clark.

"We are using the architect's plans left by Msgr. Gacquin and the general "modern" design will be the same, but our builder has been very helpful with some cost-cutting and increased efficiency measures," said Father Lewis.

The cost-cutting, he said, does not involve any change in the heating or

air-conditioning specifications. Until fairly recently, he said, a pot-bellied stove was used to heat the old church.

"The new church will seat 250 people and will be in use by the summer, but not dedicated," he said, noting with thanks the support he has had from Bishop Rodimer and the diocese through "Prepare the Way."

"We hope to have the bishop up here again as soon as possible for the dedication."

In addition to the worship area, the \$900,000 building, Father Lewis said, will include a "gathering space," sacristy and offices, and a parish hall.

St. Thomas' was established by Bishop Thomas McLaughlin on June 14, 1941, as a mission of St. Joseph parish, Newton.

"This is a missionary endeavor to spread the light of the Gospel in this region," said Bishop McLaughlin, who loved the rural ministry and spent his summers in Sussex, serving the mission he had founded earlier in Walpack.

The late Father John Hewetson was St. Thomas' first administrator and on July 6, 1941, said the first Mass in the schoolhouse that has remained as the parish church on Hainesville Road.

"The new church will be about a mile south of the original site" at 210 Route 206 North, Father said.

Father Hewetson's original mission district also included St. Matthew Mass Station at Walpack, later displaced by the Tocks Island Dam and St. James, which became a parish in 1945, with St. Thomas as its mission.

Bishop Rodimer elevated St. Thomas to "canonical parish" status in December 1987, the 50th anniversary of the founding of the diocese, "in order to provide better for the spiritual welfare of the faithful" within the territorial lines bounded by the Delaware River, several municipalities and Warren County.

The late Msgr. Gacquin had been pastor of St. Thomas and of St. James since 1977 and had earlier been administrator of both. He died in 1996.